

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER KATHLEEN Q. ABERNATHY**

Re: Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service; Petition of TracFone Wireless, Inc. for Forbearance from 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1)(A) and 47 C.F.R. § 54.201(i) (CC Docket No. 96-45).

I am very pleased to join in today's decision, which will help expand the availability of Lifeline subsidies to low-income users of resold wireless telecommunications services. In the 1996 Act, Congress directed the Commission to ensure that all Americans, "including low-income consumers," have access to telecommunications services and information services. One critical component of the Commission's effort to guarantee such access is the Lifeline program, which provides discounts to monthly telephone service for the less fortunate among us. Unfortunately, however, a 2004 analysis performed by Commission staff indicated that only about a third of households eligible for Lifeline support actually subscribe to the program.

While it is clear that today's action will not close that gap on its own, I believe it is essential that we take all possible steps to ensure that low-income users are not barred from utilizing available support on the basis of the specific technologies they wish to use or the specific business plans pursued by their service providers. By providing support to resold wireless services, we are indeed extending a "line" to customers who might not otherwise make use of the Lifeline program, and thus are helping to fulfill Congress's vision of truly *universal* service.